



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND SOCIAL UNITY.¹

TO MANY men the faith in an abiding social peace grows hardly more than a dream and a wish. Progress, so far as social solidarity is concerned, seems leading for the moment to a *cul-de-sac* walled in by contradictions of its own making. Human life has passed from savagery, where that man was safest who was most alone, to the present chaos of relationships. Never was the division of labor so minute and coöperation so imperative. Never was power more synonymous with dependence. Never was a theoretical democracy more in evidence. And yet from the evolution the social universe has not yet emerged. The division of labor has not grown coöperative; democracy was never more in need of guidance; social classes were never more sensitive to each other's prerogatives; the interests of the individual are not yet always those of society; education has not yet taught our children the art of living together as men; the church has not yet brought about the kingdom of God. To offset this disintegrating force, to what shall we look? Economic coöperation, the brute forces of army or police, foreign war, and socialism have had their champions, and to a greater or less degree each has been tried in actual life. Yet, so far as we can judge, the question still awaits an answer, and it must continue to wait

¹ The substance of this paper was given as an address at St. George's Church, New York, November 26, 1899, and I cannot help adding a few facts concerning the work so nobly conceived and administered by its rector, W. S. Rainsford, D.D. St. George's Church is on the East Side of New York, in a neighborhood once aristocratic, but at present almost entirely consisting of boarding-houses and tenements. From *St. George's Year Book* for 1899 it appears that 7,521 persons were on the books of the church, *only 537 of whom (including domestic servants) lived in private houses*; 5,034 lived in tenements. The church maintains, besides a flourishing Men's Club, a Boy's Battalion, various societies for girls and women, a kitchen-garden class, a cottage by the seaside, a sewing school, a trade school for boys, a free library, a gymnasium, a Sunday school of 2,331 members, an employment society, a relief department, a periodical club, as well as an unusual number of strictly parish organizations. The church has an endowment, and in every way is demonstrating the possibilities of a proper conception of the social functions of a church and the use of rational methods in Christian work.

until a basis be found in some fundamental human relationship so independent of the accidents of life as to be capable of appealing to all men everywhere and inciting them to greater efforts for themselves and a more spontaneous recognition of the rights of others.

It is not at all certain that any single basis of this sort will ever be found. Life is so complicated that perhaps social unity is as visionary as the fountain of life. But one thing stands true: whatever power there may lie in other aspects of human life, even a partial social unity will be but a dream to the man who shuts his eyes to religion and God. Despite one's own doubts and the apathy of organized Christianity in social reform, wherever there is to be a bundle of lives in which the humblest man and woman shall be physically and morally safe there must also be the all-embracing life of God. And in occidental society, at least, this means that the Christian church has a distinct office and duty to perform in bringing in greater social unity.

I.

One's faith in the truth of this sweeping statement rests upon two facts: first, religion has to do with powers and instincts that are not acquired, but are elemental and common to all men; and, second, a genuine Christianity makes men incapable of isolated life.

1. Religion is the expression of an elemental, common, and therefore unifying factor of human life.

To unite men, emphasis must be laid upon interests that are not mere accidents or accomplishments, but common to all. The habits of the man of wealth, his very necessities, are so far removed from the habits, and even the luxuries, of the man of poverty as to constitute a genuine, and almost insuperable, wall of separation. To insist that unity can be made possible for a people by teaching them to obey the laws governing the time for dinner and the proper style of clothes and the literature one should read, is ridiculous. No people has ever become permanently unified on the basis of customs or civilization. Customs and civilization are the results of a deeper something

in life. Nor is social unity to be found even in a devotion to art. Music, painting, sculpture, and other forms of an essentially æsthetic life have never succeeded in building up a united society. Greece with its arts was more divided than even Judea with its refusal to make to itself a graven image. The æsthetic life is a product, not a source, of social conditions. When the Romans first conquered Greece, they thought they should have a knowledge of Greek music; but a Greek orchestra only bored the conquerors, until a centurion divided the musicians into two bands and ordered them, as they played, to advance toward each other as if in battle. When once this was done, the Romans broke forth in loud applause. War they knew; music they could appreciate only as it simulated war. Perhaps men have grown less frank in the expression of their opinions, but, inestimably valuable as is art in all its forms, social millennia will never spring from symphony concerts and art exhibitions. Culture is too much a matter of the individual, too much an acquisition. The great elemental things in life are, and always have been and always must be, the basis of united social action. Within the physical sphere, for example, there is the passion for food. A nation rises or dies as one man if starvation be upon it. There is the passion for fighting—inherited from a savage past, it is true, but something which, as almost nothing else, links men together with unbreakable bonds. A little higher is the elemental desire to acquire property. From the days of Tyre and Sidon this desire has broken across geographical wastes and bound people of different races together. There is hardly a stronger bond of union than that of commercial interest, and commerce rises superior even to the brutal elemental passion for war, and demands that there shall be arbitration where formerly men rushed headlong into battle.

But hunger and fighting and the desire for property are not the only elements of human life. Besides them and above them there are such things as faith, a trust in some power outside oneself, the instinct to pray, the belief that in some way the world is not the result of a toss-up of chance, and that, once made by a God, it has not been abandoned by its Creator.

Religious instincts are as elemental as the lust for blood. They are not something learned, and so added to life. Religion is life—or, perhaps better, is one way of living. This was one of the messages of Jesus: to be religious is to live with God as well as with men. If one life is natural, so is the other, and if religion is one way of living, it can be a bond of lives in so far as it calls into action original and essentially human elements. Ignoring all questions as to the relations of his ancestors with his tribal god, the savage in the Pacific islands today kneels at the altar of the God whose first messengers he devoured. The man of culture bows before God, hesitating perhaps to assent to any sharply articulated theology, yet wishing to let his faith find expression in deeds, if not in words. The philosopher, who more than any other man appreciates the difficulties which lie inherent in theistic belief, still sees in religion a philosophy of the whole of things, and cannot believe in anything less than a general unity lying back of all sensible variety. The root of all this belief in each class of men is undoubtedly the same, whatever may be the variety in its expression. Were religion the luxury of the rich or a necessity of the poor, it would be far otherwise, for somewhere the instinct would disappear with creed, and awe with knowledge. But as the call to war leads men away from the accidents of life, the differences of business and culture and station, and binds millionaire and pauper, clubman and cowboy, into a regiment, so Christianity, if only it is true to religion, can call men from business and daily routine and join them into the indivisible kingdom of God. In the broadest sense of the word, it is faith that makes social life possible. To make men trust God better is to make them more ready to trust men better. To make them resemble God in universality of interest is to make them more companionable, more eager to do good, less eager to succeed through oppression, less isolated and self-centered, more intent upon performing duties than upon demanding rights. If men are God's sons, then must they be each other's brothers.

2. But such a statement as this leads us directly to the position of Christianity. It is fundamentally a religion, but on its social side gains its great centripetal force by the fraternal

instincts which it engenders among its followers. There has probably been in the history of social agitation no more dynamic thought than the Christian teaching as to the divine paternity and the consequent human brotherhood. Epictetus with other Stoics, it is true, recognized it, but even he could not make it dynamic. Christianity itself for hundreds of years failed equally. But just as the heart of the strict Calvinist rebelled at his logic when it came to the fate of children who died in infancy, so in the same proportion as the interest in Christianity has swung from metaphysics to its real content has the recognition of a common humanity and a universal obligation of the more privileged to the less privileged found expression in the thought of humanity's sonship to God. It is true that in support of this doctrine men have often been exegetically at fault. Jesus himself does not seem to use the parental analogy to express the universal relationships of God, but that which we mean by the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man lies in the very heart of his teaching, and no man can be said to have found the center of Christianity who does not find his life regulated and inspired by the thought for which, whether accurately or inaccurately, the words stand today.

But, further, the individual Christian, if he approach the ideal of Jesus and Paul, is being made into a man who *cannot* live an isolated life. According to the conception of Jesus, to be religious is not to depend upon external authority, to limit one's thinking, to perform certain duties, to practice protracted deprivation, and to narrow one's interests and life. On the contrary, in his own words, it is to have life and have it more abundantly. Whatever help there may be in religious rules and regulations he recognized, but, according to his conception, to live religiously was to live helpfully with men because one was living trustfully with God. The divine life in man makes altruism instinctive. The Christian dynamic is a faith that finds expression in love. The Christian virtues are not those of the hermit, but of the man who lives among his fellows—love, joy, peace, endurance, meekness, self-control, trustworthiness. Not one of these is the outgrowth of education or

of degradation, of peculiarly good or peculiarly bad environment. All of them alike are the expression of elemental religious impulses shared by all men and obtaining reinforcement and energy from a God who dwells with all men. This is another of the legacies of Jesus: a selfish man cannot be religious. As John asks: How dare one say he loves God, whom he has not seen, when he fails to love his brother, whom he has seen? He must first violate his Christian nature who seeks his own things rather than the things of others. The real impulse, the greater inclination of Christian life, is outward. The better Christian a man is, the less aristocratic and the more fraternal he is.

And so it is inevitable that as a community is composed of men whose lives are filled with the spirit of Jesus it will be bound close together. If one may paraphrase the noble saying of the church father, society, like man, is by nature Christian; in so far as it is un-Christian it is unnatural and dangerous. An irreligious aristocracy gave France the miseries of the old régime; an irreligious proletariat gave France the reign of terror; an irreligious middle class gave France the massacre of the communists; an irreligious press is giving her travesties of justice in the name of honor.

But religion primarily is not an affair of a community, but of the individuals of a community. And if it be, as one can say without cant, that many of society's ills today spring from irreligion, to cure them one must work upon the individual life as well as the social environment. Regenerate men are the only material out of which to construct a regenerate society. Panaceas may look more fascinating, are almost sure to be more dramatic, than the unheralded production of Christian character. It is always easy to leave a Christ bound for Calvary for the untested but magnificent promises of a Christ in the wilderness. But there is no surer way toward the New Jerusalem than the road of service to one's fellows made possible and heroic by an overpowering belief, as instinctive as it is magnificent, in the presence of right motives in human hearts, and a consequent unborn but developing providential order in human society. To make men Christians is to make society unified.

II.

It is at this point that we see the social office of the Christian church as an embodiment of religion. It is concerned in awakening in men instincts which are common to the race, and in inducing them to grow into the likeness of its founder, Jesus. If it fulfills this office, it is as essential to social unity as is the school or the legislature. But its method must be its own. Unlike government, it furnishes not the external force for social unity, but must stimulate and educate the social instincts in the individual life by appealing to the moral and religious nature. If it neglects this office, it fails of performing its proper functions and will be outgrown—a danger which, if not imminent, is at least, to judge from certain phases of modern sociological literature, not unexpected by some serious thinkers.

Thus the nature of its social office determines the ends by which the church must work. It is not to take the place of the school, or of government, or of institutions of popular amusement. Its work, to say the very least, must be coördinate with that of these others, but, if it would be a source of union rather than of disintegration, it must deal with those elements of human nature that find expression in religion.

1. It must appeal to and stand for life, not philosophy.

Christianity has always been marked by the two tendencies so indispensable for every evolutionary process. On the one hand, it has been a cause of disintegration in that it has stimulated men to originality and therefore difference in thought. On the other hand, it has tended toward unity within the region of common religious life. The most casual knowledge of the evolution of the Christian centuries corroborates these statements. On the one hand are the wars of the theologians, and on the other that beautiful unity of Christian spirit which makes it possible for Christians of all shades of belief to use the hymns and litanies of those with whose teachings they differ. Sometimes the Christian church has attempted to make the disintegrating tendency integrate, to bring unity into thought by the appeal to authority. Practically the earliest reference to the rise of an autocratic bishop

patristic literature has preserved for us is in connection with the preservation of correctness in doctrine. Indeed, the great structure of the Roman church and the growth of the New Testament canon are the results of the attempt made by earnest men and women in the early Christian centuries to bring men into orthodoxy. Protestantism, although originating in a revolt against coerced uniformity, and often overemphasizing Christian individualism, has itself, within the limits of separate denominations, too often attempted likewise the impossible task of accomplishing universal, authoritative orthodoxy. The result of all these efforts to reverse the natural workings of Christian forces has ultimately been failure. No reform can run long against nature. Heresy, like the church, has sprung from the blood of its martyrs. But coercion, though it still exists, is becoming an anachronism. We are getting to understand — though in some quarters very slowly — that a man who differs from us in opinion is not of necessity a bad and blasphemous man. In the same proportion as each denomination recognizes that its work is not to force men to pronounce accurately some shibboleth, but to create God-fearing, man-loving, honest lives, does it come to insist upon such teachings as are born of universal Christian experience rather than of disproportionate emphasis upon the interpretation of the Scripture. By endeavoring to give men more abundant life rather than a more voluminous theology the church will far more than now contribute toward denominational unity, and also toward a magnificent Christian unity that will not only embrace theological opponents, but bind together social classes as well. But for the church to attempt to save society by philosophy made over into a theology is desperate foolishness. Theology, invaluable, indispensable as it is, always has been and always will be a disintegrating force. To simplify theology is to help unify society. With all the stern realities of uncoördinated social life pressing in upon Christian people, it is suicidal to waste time discussing iota subscripts and the calculus of religion. The way of the church to social efficiency does not lie through heresy trials. If it would make toward unity, its appeal must be to life; and, so far as social

significance goes, the church that does not make this appeal is dead while it lives.

And what is true of religious philosophy is just as true of any other. Church members may hold different opinions as to socialism, monarchy, trusts, prohibition, evolution, and a thousand other things, but a church as a social institution is concerned with none of them. It must educate its members in the principles governing Christian conduct; it must teach them to do right at any cost; it must bring them into vital relationship with God, that their lives may get something of the divine expansion; and then it must trust them to act freely as their own intelligence and judgment dictate. As matters are today, with moral and religious teaching barred from the schools, with the state rightly but unfortunately held to be unconcerned with religion, with colleges and universities increasingly emphasizing learning and method rather than moral discipline, this educative, coördinating work of the Christian church is imperative. It alone can devote itself to that side of the elemental humanity which religion represents. If it fails in its duty here, not only will individual lives grow poorer because imperfectly developed, but the whole structure of society will suffer. The most skeptical and most irreligious of statesmen have recognized the truth of this statement, and however much they may have judged their own lives superior to the need of the religious motive, they have been anxious to maintain the church as an institution for the masses.

But the church is something more than a *deus ex machina*, and preaching is something more than a terrifying of the masses into social order and decency by an appeal to their fear of bogies. Religion, I venture to repeat, is a constituent element in human life, and, if developed along the lines indicated by a real Christianity, produces men who will constitute the better environment for which all sociologists plead. I do not mean merely that these persons will be active in seeing that reforms come to pass. Christian people are thus active despite the apathy of certain of their number and the laments of certain men whose zeal has made them as unfair as pessimistic.

Besides such assistance rendered by Christian people, each individual church has a definite social task to perform. It is an institution of its neighborhood, and as the world with Christ in it is a different thing from the world with Christ out of it, so a community, a ward, a neighborhood possessing a genuine church is better than it could possibly be without such a church. Social environment and public opinion are only other names for men and women. As men and women grow purer and more generous, and their virtues get socialized in some institution, social environment and public opinion must improve. It is here that the local church becomes of social importance. I not only is producing Christian people, but, if it is properly performing its duty, it is coördinating, socializing their influence.

But it must work out from life. It cannot socialize theological opinion. That is an affair of each individual soul. And if the church has to do with life, then it must be ready to coördinate all the aspects of life. There is a Christianity outside the church; there are customs and institutions made necessary by the course of social development; there are other virtues than the ecclesiastical. All these must be preserved, not destroyed. Jesus gave much of his teaching at dinners. Shall the ideal of the church be asceticism, which is but another word for social disintegration? Paul preached as he worked at his trade. Shall the Christian be taught that life can be split into religion and business? Jesus had pity upon the hungry. Shall a church neglect the poor in its region—or in any region? This does not make it necessary or desirable for a church to identify itself with any special political reform. That is not the function of a church, but of a state. Let the church cease to be a theological lectureship, and, without puzzling men with strange theologies and stranger class sympathies, train them in the experience of Christian living, and under the guidance of God they will be able as individual citizens to devise wise means by which social institutions and economic conditions and political machinery shall so embody the Christian spirit as shall make a Christian society less a matter of rhetoric, and Christian living easier for all classes.

This is not to say that the unity which thus the church is to assist in producing will be absolute uniformity. Absolute similarity in work and character is impossible so long as society does not return to primitive savagery. Christianity and Christian fellowship are not identical with an immediate abolition of social classes. In the present stage of human development it is a part of human nature for men and women of similar instincts and occupations to segregate. Only the anarchist plans to destroy social organization, and even he expects that after it has been thoroughly disintegrated its individuals will recombine in other and, as he believes, better groups. An army is a unity, but its very unity is a matter of organization. The spirit of Christianity is not that of individualism gone mad. What it will accomplish will be, not the destruction of social organization, but a social unity in which inevitable economic and even social differentiation will be complemented by oneness in spirit. Economic classes may remain, but social hatreds must disappear. Utopian as this may seem to a society in which competition has not yet succumbed to solidarity of interest and the spirit of Christian fellowship, the time must come when in some way or other, either with or without revolution, wealth and poverty, learning and ignorance, as well as all other accidental differences, will cease to divide men and prevent the growth of human fraternity. What society under such conditions will then resemble no man can prophesy. Perhaps these differences themselves may have been largely abolished, although it is not clear that the ideal will be reached by any socialistic program. But, however or whenever attained, it will be seen that Christianity has had the largest rôle in its accomplishment. Social unity is a fellowship in life, not in opinion or vocation, and nowhere do human lives so readily, so finally, enter into fellowship as before the altar of a God who has been revealed as Father by a Son of Man.

2. And this brings us to the heart of the whole matter, as far as the church is concerned. God is the correlative of religion. One cannot develop, or even appeal to, the religious instincts of man sanely or healthfully except by showing how they may

find satisfaction in his God. To attempt to satisfy a religious longing by a phrase or by a philosophy or by high-class amusements is to give men a stone when they have asked for bread. The church is something more than one among many social institutions. It is society's priest—that which mediates God to a race that can but does not worship. If religion is to play any part in the accomplishment of social unity, God must be treated seriously, and men must be bound together by being bound to him.

Religious thought has lately been marked by an insistence upon the immanence of God in nature; whereas he was once thought of as transcendent, and to be brought over into nature only through some bold anthropomorphism, we are now getting glimpses of a God who is always with us, whose will does not push the planets in their courses, but who is in some true sense force itself. It is hard to believe that such a philosophy any more than any other exhausts reality, and it is not yet demonstrable that God and matter are the same substance. But this new thought of God satisfies the religious wants, and the unimaginable stretch of space seems less fearful as one thinks that God is present wherever his will acts.

But for some of us, men and women are more important than the stars. Dare we think that God is as much in humanity as in heavenly space? If the thunder is still his voice, can that voice also be heard in the succession of empires, the rise of social classes, the whole sweep of social evolution? Or is God only a convenient name for the social mind, and is the materialism which in physical science is passing from atheism to agnosticism to be intrenched in sociology?

All the logic of the schools cannot prevent a theist from believing that if God be in nature he must also be in humanity; that whatever he be in one part of his universe, that he must be in another; that he who keeps the universe from tumbling into chaos is also watching over every Zion and keeping every Israel.

Nor can such a God care only for politics and war. Shall he be a God of armies and not a God of labor unions and corporations? Shall he be a God of battle and not a God of strikes?

And if no such distinction is possible, then the man who prayed for victory in war may pray for fraternity in peace, and the church that insists upon religion as a social bond must also preach a God whose presence gives efficacy to every effort toward the silencing of social discontent, who is himself the inspiration of all social as well as individual effort. Social reform needs reinforcement at just this point. It is not enough to clean up the slums, to build schoolhouses with playgrounds, to appoint boards of arbitration. All these and countless other reforms, provided only they are not reforms against nature, are necessary and invaluable. But what promise is there in them of a completed social evolution? In addition to reform, men need to feel that there is something more powerful making for social peace than even regenerate men in a new environment. That something is a God. Only he must be no fate that sits and grins at human misery, but one who is the guardian of widows and orphans, who knows our human needs, and who can so work upon the hearts of men that they shall turn from injustice to justice and from selfishness to love.

I know the response likely to be made to this. It is a return to the faith of childhood, and that for men is very difficult. It is easy to see God in the calculable, impersonal course of sun and comet, but it is tragically hard to see him in the economic world in which one struggles. One may even be indifferent as to whether God really works in the law of gravitation; but what if he be said to work in Gresham's law or the iron law of wages? It is easier, then, to fall back on social psychology and leave God to the theologian.

But, none the less, there are the facts of social evolution, and, despite its own questions, the church must take up its Master's work, and, while it teaches men to be kind and helpful, it must also insist that they can believe in a God that still loves and reigns; who in the last analysis is the basis of social law—the One who will give men the kingdom.

Times change, but man and God and faith survive. With many a David mad to wrest from some unwilling Nabal the

wealth he holds to be his by equity, if not by law; with many a Nabal clinging to privilege and monopoly he is too blind to see are another's quite as much as his own; out from our storm-and-stress period, we, too, believe that humanity is something more than selfishness and that life is more than meat. But we need to be taught that religion is social as well as individualistic; that from the union of lives alone there can result safety and peace; and that the bundle into which lives are to be bound must be the life of God. Only the church that sets before itself this social service is working in the spirit of its Master; it alone really appreciates its responsibility in converting society into the kingdom of God.

SHAILER MATHEWS.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.